

Washtenaw County Dog Slayings Ann Arbor News Coverage

3/25/06

By Art Aisner
News Staff Reporter

Animal cruelty investigators found two more dog carcasses and two dead foxes along roads in Superior Township Friday, prompting a Humane Society of Huron Valley official to caution residents to not only watch over their pets but themselves as well.

The animals were found in the general area of Geddes and Harris roads in varied stages of decomposition, said Tanya Hilgendorf, executive director of the area humane society. The dogs, which appear to be a black Labrador and a Rottweiler, were decapitated, and the foxes were skinned, Hilgendorf said.

Thirty animals have now been found in similar conditions within miles of each other in a mostly rural part of the township since January, including seven discovered Thursday. The carcasses appear to be those of both feral animals and pets.

"Clearly at this point, this is someone who is a danger to the community and not just animals, but people too," Hilgendorf said. "I think people should be worried because this is not one isolated event, and there is a very disturbed individual or individuals out there."

The reward for information leading to an arrest reached \$5,500 Friday, Hilgendorf said, and continues to grow as news of the grisly discoveries spreads. Julie Curtis, the organization's cruelty investigator, has received well more than 100 calls with carcass sightings and tips. "We're getting lots of good information and are still putting things together, but our investigator spends half the day picking up dead bodies," Hilgendorf said.

Curtis is responding to calls of carcass sightings and patrolling the roadways as well. Cmdr. David Egeler of the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department, which is not directly involved in the investigation, said people should be vigilant about monitoring their pets.

"We encourage people to use the same amount of due diligence they would normally use when walking or running with their dogs, or letting them roam freely," he said.

Anyone with information is asked to call Curtis at 734-662-5585, ext. 112.

Art Aisner can be reached at aisner@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6823.

4/1/06

Officials: Suspects not linked to dog killings

Art Aisner

News Staff Reporter

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has identified two suspects believed responsible for illegally dumping deer carcasses in Superior Township, but there is no apparent connection to the rash of dog killings in that area, officials said.

The carcasses were among nearly 40 wild and domesticated animal found dead along roadways in the past few months, prompting a criminal investigation and a \$20,000 reward leading to an arrest.

Many of the dogs were found bound and decapitated.

Tanya Hilgendorf, executive director of the Humane Society of Huron Valley, said Friday the criminal investigation is centered on the slaying of nine dogs and the reward is still active. "We're following up on every aspect," Hilgendorf said.

The deer carcasses are believed to be remnants from last fall's hunting season, said DNR Sgt. Cherie Beckhorn.

Beckhorn said there's no indication that the deer or coyotes were taken illegally, but that authorities consider carcass dumping akin to littering. She said people usually dump the carcasses illegally to avoid disposal fees.

Killing wild animals is not always a crime, but dumping their bodies inappropriately is - even though it is a minor infraction punishable with a ticket, Hilgendorf said.

The formal animal-cruelty investigation under way by officials with the DNR, the Humane Society, and the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department, is centering on the dead dogs, the first of which was found March 16 near the intersection of Harris and Geddes roads. The felony charge carries a four-year prison sentence upon conviction.

No potential dog owners have been identified.

Several coyotes and foxes were found skinned and dumped in various locations around the county, but most in Superior Township, in mid-January.

Hilgendorf said the number of tips from concerned community members has waned in the last week, but that investigators are still following leads provided by residents.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Humane Society at 734-662-5585, ext. 112.

Staff reporter Amalie Nash contributed to this report. Art Aisner can be reached at aaisner@annarbornnews.com or 734-994-6823.

4/5/06

By Lisa Allmendinger
News Special Writer

It's been more than a week since another animal carcass has been discovered in Superior Township, but the rash of dog killings and mutilated bodies of animals found there still has residents on edge.

About 100 people filled the Superior Township Hall on Tuesday night to express their concerns and ask questions of officials from the township, the Humane Society of Huron Valley, the state Department of Natural Resources and the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department.

"Basically, there's many unanswered questions in regard to the mutilations and the dog heads," township resident Judy Kirk said after the hour-long meeting.

Nine dogs have been found dead, some of them decapitated and bound. All appear to be family pets or former pets, according to Humane Society officials. Yet, neither the Humane Society nor the sheriff's department has received any reports of missing or stolen dogs.

"We don't know where they are coming from," said Julie Curtis, cruelty investigator for the Humane Society.

In addition, there have been a total of about 30 deer, coyote and dog carcasses found dumped illegally in the township, and the DNR is investigating.

Kirk said she's had dogs since she was 7 years old. Her pet, Spirit, a retriever mix, was safely at home while she attended the meeting.

"I'm appalled at all of this. Nothing like this has ever happened before since I've been here," said Kirk, who moved to Superior Township in 1981.

The sheriff's department has a detective assigned to the case and the Humane Society has received more than 300 tips. Reward money has reached \$20,000, all donated by individuals. Sheriff's Cmdr. David Egeler said necropsies have been performed on the animals. He said the tests look for physical evidence, which could possibly lead authorities to a suspect or suspects. He would not release any forensic information, saying it could jeopardize the investigation.

"This is a particularly disturbing case, not just for the voiceless animals," said Tanya Hilgendorf, executive director of the Humane Society.

Hilgendorf said anyone who would do this to an animal has the potential to harm humans. She said that probation officers, child and adult protective services personnel have been made aware of the details of the cases.

Officials recommended that pet owners keep tags on their dogs' collars or better yet, have microchips placed in the animals.

"Be vigilant about watching your pets. Have them on a leash or behind a fence," Egeler said.

John Hudson, Neighborhood Watch coordinator and Superior Township ordinance enforcement officer, said he's had fewer complaints about loose and barking dogs since the cruelty investigation began.

"We have a township ordinance," he said, referring to laws against allowing dogs to run freely in the township. "People are watching their dogs more now."

One resident, who owns horses, expressed concern about a possible escalation of animal abuse. She wondered if she should add more fencing or additional alarms. "I can't sleep in my barn to protect my horses," she said. "What can I do?"

"I don't know what to tell you," Egeler said. "If we felt this was a situation where you should be locking your doors and staying inside, we'd let you know."

Kirk said she feels very safe where she lives in the township. "I have very good neighbors who look out for me and for my dog," she said.

Anyone with information that could aid the investigation is asked to call 734-662-5585, ext. 127.

4/14/2006

Reward at \$20,000;no new discoveries made in 3 weeks

By Amalie Nash

News Staff Reporter

A \$20,000 reward, more than 300 tips and national exposure have failed to solve the disturbing case of decapitated dogs in Superior Township, but authorities said they're making progress. During the period between March 16 and 27, the bodies of nine dogs - some bound and decapitated - were found in Superior Township.

But no new discoveries have been made in nearly three weeks. And authorities have not identified any of the owners of the dogs.

Officials have also publicly said the illegal dumping of wild animal carcasses, some decapitated, is not believed to be linked to the dog cases. Initially, all the animal bodies - which included coyotes, foxes and deer - were believed to be related.

Julie Curtis, a cruelty investigator with the Humane Society of Huron Valley, said she could not discuss why the discoveries appear to have stopped or whether all of the dog cases are connected.

"It's an extensive investigation, and we're following a lot of leads," Curtis said.

After the first discovery - the body of a Rotweiler bound and decapitated - a \$500 reward for information was offered. That figure has climbed to \$20,000.

The case has received national attention from media outlets that include CNN, Fox News and the Today show on NBC. Tanya Hilgendorf, the executive director of the Humane Society, said the organization has received many calls.

"We've been pleasantly surprised at the level of support and concern that's come from across the country," Hilgendorf said. "It shows that people really care about animals and animal cruelty. We've been heart-warmed by the outpouring of support."

Hilgendorf said many people also have been asking how to help, and she has recommended donating funds for the investigation, volunteering in the shelter or adopting animals.

Curtis said many of the more than 300 tips have been helpful, but she could not discuss other aspects of the investigation in detail.

Anyone with information on the case is asked to call the Humane Society tip line at 734-662-5585, ext. 127.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6832

